

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of December 8, 1941.

†*Sons o' Fun" opened Monday, December 1st, at the Winter Garden.

†*Twelfth Night" opened Tuesday, December 2nd, at the Little Theatre.

†*Sunny River" opened Thursday, December 4th, at the St. James Theatre.

†*Angel Street" opened Friday, December 5th, at the John Golden Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"

NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always
an up to date file of the New York Stage.

Published by

CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, 122 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Yearly Subscription
\$15.00

"Angel Street"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 6, 1941

"Angel Street" Is a Thriller From London, and No Mistake

"Angel Street," melodrama by Patrick Hamilton. Produced by Shepard Traube, in association with Alex H. Cohen, at the John Golden Theatre, New York, Dec. 5, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

WATCH me closely, ladies and gents! I think I am about to teeter off the deep end. I have just seen the theatre really come alive for the first time this season. A London thriller called "Angel Street," at the Golden, is responsible.

But don't get me wrong I mean the THEATRE. Not the important theatre. Or the theatre of social significance. No, no—not the intellectual theatre. Or the pseudo-educational theatre.

Just the good old emotional hokum theatre in which your interest is definitely challenged along about 9:15 and held taut until 11 o'clock.

Remember "Kind Lady"? Like it? Good! Then this one is for you. It is quite a little like "Kind Lady." It, too, has a pale-faced heroine in jeopardy. She, too, is menaced by a criminal of maniacal tendencies.

I think it is written with more distinction than "Kind Lady." Patrick Hamilton is the author. He wrote "Rope." Or was it "Rope's End"?

Inspiring Performances

And I know it is about as well acted as it could be. Practically makes a star of Leo Carroll, who might be good old Sherlock Holmes himself come again to life. Shepard Traube has staged it with a good deal of skill.

"Gas Light" was the London title. It was played over there two years ago. It has to do with a handsome devil named Manningham, who is married to a gentle woman younger than himself.

He would be rid of her, if he could, fearing that she is beginning to suspect that he has been slyly working for months to drive her insane.

She knows her mother died in an asylum, and when he begins hiding things, and accusing her of putting them away just to plague him, she begins slowly to believe that

she has mental lapses during which she is unconscious of what she does.

Then in walks good old Rough from Scotland Yard. Hearty, amiable, friendly, paternal Rough gradually restores the desperate young woman's confidence. Chirks up the audience, too.

Then starts the game of trying to uncover the necessary evidence against Manningham—did I tell you he had strangled old Mrs. Barlow fifteen years before and is still looking for her rubies?—before Manningham can finish doing away with his misus.

It is a pretty exciting game, I can tell you, if you like expertly staged melodrama. The Carroll performance is one to cheer about. It is deft in movement, completely convincing in character, perfect in timing the emotional climaxes, and all accomplished without ruffling an eyelash or speaking above a good conversational tone.

Vincent Price also plays the suave Manningham with distinction. He is the impeccable gentleman who can smile and sport the best-dressed man's wardrobe and be a villain still.

Judith Evelyn, an American by way of Canada, is the badgered Mrs. Manningham, and here also is a striking performance. In support the always dependable Florence Edney and Elizabeth Eustis, a pert and pleasing newcomer, are of great help.

One set, five characters and coating no more than a couple of sickles to produce! Can you imagine how dumb our showmen must have been to let this one drift about for two years?

Helps explain what's wrong with the theatre, doesn't it?



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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS



"Angel Street"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 6, 1941

Angel Street a Top Thriller

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THIRTEEN years ago, in Rope's End, Patrick Hamilton wrote the most exciting and adult horror play our modern theater has seen. After all these years, during which lesser men have tried their hands at twisting the spines of audiences, this same Mr. Hamilton was heard from once again last night in a melodrama known as Angel Street. If it is not quite so good as was its predecessor, it can still claim the high distinction of being the best, most uncompromising and most tingling thriller which has been presented herabouts since Rope's End was first produced.

Think back to King Lady, to Payment Deferred, to Criminal-at-Large, to Dangerous Corner, Night Must Fall, Ladies in Retirement, or any of the other psychological melodramas which have unnerved you, and you cannot help realizing how Mr. Hamilton's two scripts have outdistanced them all in the talent for literate horror which has animated them.

When it comes to crime Mr. Hamilton is a classicist. He does not cheat or truckle. He gets along brilliantly without sliding panels, screams in the dark or any of the regulation cheap tricks. He is an Englishman who takes his murders straight. No low comedy interrupts his terrors. He is not interested in having suspicion point like the hands of a clock during the evening at every member of his cast. He puts his gory cards on the table and invites us to look gradually into the minds of his villains and their victims no less than into the record of their misdeeds. The mental workings of the hunted and the hunter are the mainsprings of his action. Moreover, Mr. Hamilton is a man who writes well.

A Victorian Melodrama

Angel Street, as it was admirably acted, set, lighted and directed at the Golden last night, comes as a new proof of Mr. Hamilton's un-

canny skill. It is what he chooses to identify as a Victorian melodrama. Its story is slight but almost unbearably nerve-racking. It is so skillfully developed both in the text and the production that only in an occasional moment in the second act are you allowed to realize how much irresistible suspense is being created by Mr. Hamilton's manipulation of five characters and a plot that is single-tracked.

Far be it from me to spoil the tense pleasures in store for you at Angel Street by giving any of its many twists away. Suffice it for me to suggest that in a shadowy Victorian room, excellently designed by Lemuel Ayers so as to be a proper host to terror, Mr. Hamilton tells how a soft-spoken, handsome and horrible man with a homicidal past comes near to succeeding with his deliberate plan to drive his wife mad.

Excellent Characterization

Mr. Hamilton has written his melodrama with a wonderfully grown-up and insistent grimness. And the cruelly damaging thrusts of his text have been superlatively well realized by Shepard Traube both in his direction and his casting. On no New York stage is a

'ANGEL STREET'

A melodrama in three acts by Patrick Hamilton; staged by Shepard Traube; settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers; presented by Mr. Traube at the John Golden Theater on December 5, 1941. The cast: Mrs. Manningham..... Judith Evelyn
Mr. Manningham..... Vincent Price
Nancy..... Elizabeth Eustis
Elizabeth..... Florence Edney
Rough..... Leo G. Carroll

better company assembled than this one at the Golden which, with Mr. Hamilton's and Mr. Traube's aid, chills the blood, sends the moments racing by and makes only the intermission seem long.

Florence Edney and Elizabeth Eustis, who play the older and the younger of the household's two servants, are both excellent. Vincent Price as the evil husband gives an even better performance than he did as the Prince Consort in Victoria Regina. It is an astonishingly fine characterization; forceful, modulated, cerebral and hauntingly sinister.

Judith Evelyn as his tortured wife is a "find" who puts Broadway heavily in Mr. Traube's debt. Miss Evelyn is an exceptional actress, possessed of magnificent intensity. Here is no ordinary skill. Her vocal range is wide and her projection of the character complete. Although she plays her scenes of torture with extraordinary variety, she none the less manages to save herself for a climax of surprising force at the evening's end. As needs no re saying at this late date, Leo G. Carroll is one of the most capable performers that our stage boasts. As Rough (and who Rough is you will have to find out for yourself) Mr. Carroll again makes clear how authoritative, polished and inimitable are his gifts when he is permitted to round out a part worthy of his talents.

Angel Street is, in other words, a psychological thriller I would urge you to see. It is theater of an enormously exciting sort. Indeed, I am happy to thank it for one of the season's best evenings, and certainly its most shuddery.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 6, 1941

Patrick Hamilton's 'Angel Street' Is the New Mystery Drama at the Golden Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Patrick Hamilton writes his thrillers within a small compass, he writes them with infinite craft and dexterity. "Angel Street," which sent a chill up the spine of the Golden Theatre last evening, comes off the top part of the theater's top shelf. For Mr. Hamilton, who wrote the "Rope's End" of 1929, is telling an extremely slight tale of Victorian torture with perfect balance and suspense. He never raises his voice much higher than a shudder. And Shepard Traube, who serves as director, has matched Mr. Hamilton's skill in a tingling performance that fills the theatre with an ominous and terrifying illusion.

Probably we should take the minor witchcraft of the theatre at its own value without endowing it with the sublime qualities of art. All Mr. Hamilton and the actors aspire to is a good dose of the heebie-geebees. But they have done their jobs like a guild of master craftsmen, and it is impossible not to rejoice in their success.

Mr. Hamilton is telling the demonic story of the Manninghams of Angel Street. Under the guise of kindness Mr. Manningham is

torturing his wife into insanity. He accuses her of petty aberrations that he has arranged himself; and since her mother died of insanity, she is more than half-convinced that she, too, is going out of her mind. While her husband is out of the house, a benign police inspector visits her and ultimately proves to her that her husband is a maniacal criminal suspected of a murder committed fifteen years ago in the same house, and that he is pre-

paring to dispose of her. The rest of "Angel Street" is devoted to getting the evidence and proving the case.

Not very much material for a full evening in the theatre, you may be thinking. But Mr. Hamilton is a genuine writer. He understates his horrors. He never strays outside the ballistics of dark, soft-footed nervousness. He draws his characters patiently and with some detail. The pace of the narrative is maddeningly leaden. He does not really clear away the black pall of mystery until the final curtain. And no matter how experienced a theatregoer you may be, you are never sure that the detective will not forget the hat he has left on the desk in plain view of the criminal who is just entering and you are never quite sure that the detective will not turn out to be a confederate or a crook working the same side of the street.

The performance is a triumph of skill in little things. Lemuel Ayers has designed a lugubrious Victorian living room which Feder has filled with baleful light. As the unpleasant Mr. Manningham Vincent Price is giving an excellent performance of unctuous-voiced, assured, dissembling gentleness. Judith Evelyn plays the frightened Mrs. Manningham with remarkable imagination and almost painful fidelity. As the housekeeper Florence Edney is wonderfully rigid with anxiety, and Elizabeth Eustis is amusingly chipper as squalid-tempered maid. As the benignant inspector Leo G. Carroll has the best part he has had for years. If he is glad, his votaries are with him. For he plays it with the little humors and crotchets, inflections and flourishes of a thoroughly experienced actor.

No one should play "Angel Street" less expertly than Mr. Traube's actors. If any one played it more expertly the audience would scream with fright. As a matter of fact, it did last evening when Mr. Carroll almost forgot to snatch up his hat before hiding in the next room.

"Angel Street"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 6, 1941

Good News

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

SINCE one of the crying needs of this theatrical season has been a good, sinister horror play, there is particular reason for welcoming with open arms the excellent new melodrama called "Angel Street." For, under this equivocal and indefinite title, there stands revealed a work that is everything one would hope for from the pen of Patrick Hamilton, who wrote "Rope's End," which has long stood as the classic example of its chilly school of grisly dread. Sagely directed by its producer, Shepard Traube, and splendidly acted by a virtually perfect cast, this "Victorian thriller," as it is billed, proves to be just the sort of delightfully flesh-tingling narrative that should delight the soul of any one who feels that honest, old-fashioned thrills still have their illustrious place in the drama.

The excitement in "Angel Street" is direct and forthright, but it is also shrewdly and intelligently devised. At the start, though, the reviewer faces the great difficulty of telling the prospective playgoer of the admirable things awaiting him in Mr. Hamilton's melodrama without destroying too much of the brilliant suspense that enlivens it. It should be safe to say, however, that this is the story of an evil husband who seems bent on driving

his wife to madness just for the pleasure he finds in his own wickedness. Thereupon, there enters a gentleman who says that he is Sergeant Rough, of Scotland Yard, and proceeds to let the unhappy wife know that there is more in the husband's cruelty than mere sadism. From then on it is a tale of horror, terror, crime and suspense that is manipulated with masterful skill.

At their best, the English have a civilized taste in these macabre theatrical matters, and "Angel Street" stands decidedly in the front rank of an honorable school of dramatic writ-

ing. The new work can accomplish things in the way of almost unbearable suspense merely by brightening or dimming a gaslight or by threatening to leave a hat in view of the audience. Perhaps it is just a bit shameless in the way it plays upon the emotions and the spines of its spectators but for most of the time its excitement is as honest as it is authentic. It really can keep you anchored to your seat bolt upright, without any more possibility of escape than the wife seems to have from her husband. Its characters are admirably drawn, also, and in the person of the fatherly policeman named Rough you have one of the really delightful characters of detective fiction, a gentleman worthy to stand in the brilliant company of the immortal Sergeant Cuff of "The Moonstone."

The acting is a comfort. In his days in the theater, Vincent Price has never been nearly so fine as he is as the cold, sneering, implacable husband. It is a performance beautifully filled with menace, without ever seeming too melodramatic or extravagant. Leo G. Carroll, who is obviously one of the best actors in this country, has one of the finest roles of his life as Rough, and he creates a portrait of exceptional skill. An actress new to these parts, Miss Judith Evelyn, provides a picture of oncoming madness that is at once terrifying, touching and utterly persuasive. In the smaller role of a maid of dubious morals another newcomer, Miss Elizabeth Eustis, is excellent, and in the lesser part of another servant Miss Florence Edney helps out. The mood of the play, both Victorian and sinister, is strikingly captured by Lemuel Ayres's settings and costumes and by Feder's lighting. "Angel Street" is an enchanting thriller.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 6, 1941

"Angel Street," a Victorian Thriller, at the Golden Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

CONNOISSEURS of what is sometimes called the "psychological thriller" still have vivid memories of "Ropes' End," a fascinating horror play by Patrick Hamilton produced here over ten years ago. In it two Oxford undergraduates murdered a fellow student for the thrill of the thing, and were eventually found out by an older man who understood how their minds worked and knew how to make them betray themselves.

Now Shepard Traube has come back from Hollywood and produced on Broadway another work by that same Patrick Hamilton, who is now, we understand, serving somewhere in Europe with Britain's armed forces. "Angel Street" is what Mr. Traube calls the play, but it was originally known as "Gaslight" and was produced under that title two years ago in London. It has since been seep in this country in various summer theatres and on the West Coast. As "Angel Street" it made its local bow last night at the John Golden Theatre.

"Ropes' End" was not the sort of play that could be blithely recommended to everybody without reservation, nor is "Angel Street" designed for theatregoers whose idea of the perfect drama is a cute love story in which the leading lady displays her mannerisms and her wardrobe for three acts full of idle chatter about fashion and sex.

Mr. Hamilton's dramatic works appeal especially to admirers of the literary efforts of such writers as Mrs. Belloc Lowndes and Francis Iles. Although classified as thrillers, they are more intellectually satisfying than more obvious mystery melodramas depending for their excitement on feminine shrieks in the dark, sinister Orientals or sliding panels.

The Manningshams

"Angel Street" is laid in a dark house in the Fimlico district of London in the year 1880, and is concerned with a Mr. and Mrs. Manningsham who live there. Mrs. Manningsham appears to be going mad, and her husband is alternately tender and exasperated at her inability to remember what she has done

with things, and her tendency to have vivid 'dreams' that could never have happened. Then, as usual in the evening, he goes out, leaving her alone except for the servants downstairs, and a gentleman named Rough comes to call. He tells her a surprising story, and then the gas lights grow dimmer and dinner.

It is impossible to go further into the story of "Angel Street" without ruining much of its excitement for those who may wish to experience it. Mr. Hamilton, who is a clever dramatist, creates atmosphere and develops character with a sure hand, and his first act especially is brilliantly contrived to generate suspense and create a mounting horror in the minds of the audience. Although the second and third acts do not match it, they carry on the story with sufficient skill to sustain interest in the proceedings.

With only three main characters and two servants to work with, this is something of a feat. This is not a play in which somebody is shot at every ten minutes. There is not, in fact, a single corpse on the stage. Nor is it overflowing with uproarious quips and gags after the fashion of so many recent murder-with-mirth plays. Mr. Rough is a pretty amusing fellow, granted, but "Angel Street" is not primarily concerned with corpses or with humor. Rather, it is a study of mental suggestion, of the trapping of a criminal who is also

a maniac, and the solving of a mystery that has baffled Scotland Yard for fifteen years.

Superior Acting

Mr. Traube has given "Angel Street" an uncommonly good production. As stage director he has kept up the tension with considerable success, although Mr. Hamilton has written an unusually long first act and let things slip a bit in a shorter second. Perhaps Mr. Traube would do well to cut a few minutes out of the beginning of the play, where the scene between the Manningshams runs somewhat overlong. With the arrival of Mr. Rough, however, the interest is caught and held with astonishing fidelity through the evening.

Not a little of the success of this venture in its own particular style is the acting of the talented cast Mr. Traube has got together at the Golden. It is impossible to imagine anybody improving upon the performance of Leo Carroll as Mr. Rough, with his Midland twang and his genial understanding of the troubles assailing Mrs. Manningsham. It has long been an accepted fact on Broadway that Mr. Carroll is an actor from whom an intelligent performance can always be expected, even though his roles do not always give him the opportunity he deserves. This time he has a part worth doing, and he is something to see in it.

Vincent Price, remembered as the Prince Consort with Helen Hayes in "Victoria Regina," has come back from Hollywood an easier, freer actor than he used to be. In some of his stage appearances here after "Victoria" passed away, we found Mr. Price stiff and somewhat wooden. He has improved of late, and is now giving an excellent account of himself as Mr. Manningsham.

Florence Edney and Elizabeth Eustis as the two servants in the household fit into Lemuel Ayres' Victorian setting neatly, but the news of the evening was the Broadway debut of Judith Evelyn as Mrs. Manningsham. Miss Evelyn, who is an American, nevertheless has done most of her acting in Canada and in England. She has appeared on the West Coast in the same role she now has at the Golden, and it was there Mr. Traube saw her.

Miss Evelyn's performance as a distraught woman who fears she is going, or has gone, mad, can only be described as extraordinary. This sort of on-the-brink-of-hysteria business is almost always overdone in the theatre, and Miss Evelyn manages to be supremely convincing at it without tossing herself into the customary stage frenzy full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Her mental distress is reflected in her whole physical being, movement, voice. They were shouting "Brava" for Miss Evelyn as we left the theatre last night.

"Angel Street"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 6, 1941

'Angel Street,' a Scare Drama, Opens at John Golden Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PATRICK HAMILTON is a writer of plays who labors contentedly toward a single end, leaving more complicated effects for those who fancy them. All Mr. Hamilton wants to do is to make an audience's hair stand straight up, and at this Mr. Hamilton is no slouch. Ten years ago, when many of us had more hair to be raised, he did pretty well with a bizarre thriller called "Rope's End." He does pretty well again with "Angel Street," which opened last evening at the Golden.

Mr. Hamilton knows that dim rooms encourage the creeps and that there is nothing more horrifying than unmotivated depravity. So in "Angel Street" he moves his scene back to the London of 1880s, when rooms were lighted by flickering gas flames and the furniture and costumes made even the most normal shiver. And he constructs a villain who is black to the core, working toward his goal—which is after all only to steal a few jewels worth 12,000 pounds—by cutting the

throats of old ladies and scaring younger ladies into the madhouse. These ingredients make a stimulating scary play, at least for a couple of acts.

The plot is somewhat skimpy, and it is difficult to do more than mention it without giving too much away. It may be enough to know that handsome, but diabolical, Mr. Manning-

ham spends most of his time trying to convince frail, timid Mrs. Manningham that she is insane. He hopes this will get her out of the way so that he can go on searching for the gems, which he overlooked fifteen years before when he killed a nice old lady for them in that same gloomy residence. He drives his wife to the verge, at least, of madness before help comes in the shape of Inspector Rough, a jovial but perceptive detective of whom Mr. Hamilton may properly be proud. What happens in the end you will have to find out for yourself.

The play's scary quality grows out of tiny touches—missing grocery bills, hats left on desks, grisly understatements by the villain and the mysterious dimming of lights. Such things as these, plus excellent acting, make the first act creepy, exciting stuff, and much of the second act will also alarm you. The author runs out of plot in the last act, and raises voices unconvincedly, but by that time the good is done. It would be nice to sit on the edge of an orchestra chair for a full three acts, but it appears that this is a season in which we can't have everything.

Vincent Price, of all people, is as sinister as a villain needs to be, and Judith Evelyn looks frightened to death as his living victim. A couple of other parts, put in to thicken things up a little, are nicely played by Elizabeth Eustis and Florence Edney. But it is Leo G. Carroll, playing the inspector with humor and assurance, giving just that touch of common-sense normality which points up dark menace, who does the most for "Angel Street." There've been more substantial thrillers than this, certainly, but this is the theater's scare of the month.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, December 6, 1941

'Angel Street' Opens at Golden Theatre

Mystery Thriller a Study of Mental, Physical Fear

By JOHN ANDERSON

PATRICK HAMILTON who once froze the town's marrows with a brilliant thriller called "Ropes' End" has turned out another in "Angel Street" which Shepard Traube presented at the John Golden Theatre last night, in association with Alexander H. Cohen. As acted by a small but expert cast in an ominous setting designed to scare the daylight out of you, it is guaranteed to chill the hottest spine and cause "each particular hair to stand on end."

Like "Rope's End" which was based to some extent on the Loeb-Leopold case, this is a psychological study, filled with mental terror and dank physical fear. It has the pervasive threat in its atmosphere that gave "Kind Lady" its most potent fascination and the hypnotic horror that jolted the audiences at the second act curtain in "Payment Deferred." If "Angel Street" isn't quite up to "Rope's End" it is better than most others.

Adroit Plot

To hint at any of its details would be to spoil it outright for future playgoers, for while Mr. Hamilton never resorts to cheap trickery for his effects, the twists of his story are so adroit, and so much a part of it that the disclosure of any one of them would unravel the whole thing.

When the play was produced in London in 1938 it was called "Gas Light" which, though not a good title, suggests not only the period but a sinister clue to the plot. We see at curtain rise an elegantly dressed gentleman of London of 1880 with his pale and lovely wife in their dim, and somehow terrifying living room in Pimlico. She is not well. He is gentle and solicitous. He is worried because she seems to be losing her mind, as her poor mother did, and he proposes gallily to take her to the theatre to help her to forget impending insanity.

Then suddenly Mr. Manningham asks his wife what became of a small picture that was on the wall, and calls in the servants and makes them kiss the Bible and swear they didn't touch it. Mrs. Manningham in a frenzy of protest grabs the Bible in a solemn oath that she didn't touch it either. Whereupon the play's stealthy spring begins to unwind in a

scene of ferocious cruelty and before any of us knew it we were glued in agonized fascination to a narrative of fiendish detail and gathering terror.

Curdles the Blood

If I tell you that a character by the name of Rough suddenly appears I must stop there lest I disclose his identity. If I tell you that up a staircase that might have come out of the House of Usher is a mystery to curdle the blood I must pause at the bottom step and let you ransack the premises for yourself. If I suggest that in this very room . . . And that over there by the window . . . Or indicate for an instant why it is the gas lights . . . No, no, I refuse to testify. The play is good enough to deserve its own hideous secret.

Mr. Hamilton's writing is dramatically adroit and the characters sharply drawn. In Lemuel Ayres provocative setting and under Mr. Traube's taut direction, the cast gives an altogether admirable performance. As Mr. Manningham, Vincent Price is excellent, conveying suavely and powerfully the exact quality of the writing. In her Broadway debut Judith Evelyn portrays superbly a horror-stricken lady caught in the equivocal tangle of the plot, and Leo G. Carroll plays the character named Rough with the crisp casualness of his best performance. Elizabeth Eustis, also in her New York debut, and the ever reliable Florence Edney, handle smaller parts with equal expertise.

The only clue I can give you is to see it.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 7, 1941

Fatal Elegance In 'Rope's End'

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE many friends of the authentic shudder will be pleased to hear that it has finally returned to town and is stopping at the Golden. Patrick Hamilton, whose *Rope's End* of many seasons back is still hailed by connoisseurs, has concocted another English thriller which, if less notable, is, all in all, pretty satisfying; the more so, as it has been given an almost perfect production. *Angel Street* is none of your whooped-up, high-pitched affairs, with faces in the window or corpses in the closet. It is, instead, a claustrophobic tale of London's gaslight era, skillfully elaborate in its writing and menacingly quiet in tone; something which has about it the padding stealth of stockinged feet.

If all of *Angel Street* were up to its beautifully unfolded first act it would be a thriller of real distinction. Hamilton begins by showing how a cold, heartless husband—under a thin guise of kindly forbearance—is torturing his wife in the hope of driving her insane. But what at first would seem to be a study in sheer cruelty turns out, with the arrival of an inspector from Scotland Yard, to have a deeply criminal motive behind it.

By the end of the first act the audience knows all the facts; what remains to be found is the evidence. And this forces the author into a weaker position, since the detective-story side of *Angel Street* is neither very abundant nor very complex. The second act is thin and has to be padded out with a great many little tricks and pieces of hokum. But the last act regains some of the power of the first and the end is a kind of psychological dénouement which comes after the plot has run its course, is a smash.

Making her Broadway debut, Judith Evelyn does a brilliantly resourceful job as the wife, ranging from careful realism to high Victorian hysterics. Vincent Price handles the cunning, sneering husband with real authority and Leo G. Carroll is deft and attractive as the representative from Scotland Yard. Lemuel Ayres' set is suitably atmospheric.

"Sunny River"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, December 5, 1941

'Sunny River' Opens at St. James Theatre

Sigmund Romberg's Music Highlights Operetta of Early New Orleans

By JOHN ANDERSON

SINCE he has a number of prosperous shows in town, Max Gordon is said to hold the pulse of the public with the fingers of Midas, so that it beats out pure gold, causing thereby as much happiness among the playgoers as it does in the box offices.

He may be right again for all I know in guessing the customer's taste in "Sunny River," the Hammerstein-Romberg musical which opened last night at the St. James.

It is large, lavish, colorful, and handsomely sung. Thus far I can agree with its enthusiastic First Audience before my own pulse taps out a sour "No." For these assets seemed heavily over weighed by these show's insistent dullness.

There is, I know, an argument, probably started by librettists, that the book of an operetta makes no difference and that if it gets its songbirds on and offstage at the right moments, for solos, duets, male-calls, and choruses, it is all right.

But it seems to me that the story ought to be at least as interesting as the reasons for singing it, and that a little imagination never does the theatre any harm.

Tale of Two Women

"Sunny River" seems woefully uninspired, in spite of its romantic background, the New Orleans of 1864-1815. It plods heavily through the tale of two women and their fight over a handsome baritone. It tells how the wealthy lady tricked the lowly soprano (who seems to be an innocent inmate of a house of sin) out of marriage and how the lovelorn pair, discovering the deception, tried to recapture

their lost romance, only to lose again. The hero died at the Battle of New Orleans preceded, I should say, at some distance, by the libretto which leaves both women bereft at the final curtain, but still vocal.

This tale is told listlessly, with occasional attempts to chirk it up with a little humor which seems to make matters worse by its tasteless leering. I am not contending that an operetta has to be funny (though that helps when the going is bad) but merely that it ought to have enough vitality to sit up and make itself interesting.

With the collapse of the book department the evening is left pretty much to Mr. Romberg and his singers. They rescue whatever is saved at the St. James. Mr. Romberg knows how to fill the theatre with surging music that builds to dramatic climaxes, and he hits his most tuneful high spots in "Call It a Dream" and "Along the Winding Road," but tops them both in "Let Me Live Today," a resounding piece, drenched in his most vivid colors.

Singing Superb

If Muriel Angelus and Bob Lawrence seemed unanimated in the parts it is doubtless because the parts are lifeless, for their singing is superb and affords the truest pleasure of the evening. Tom Ewell and Howard Freeman make the most of some wretchedly poor comedy material, and Helen Claire, who once kissed the Boys Good-Bye, is at a disadvantage as a non-singer and otherwise unpleasant character. Ethel Levey cavorts around as the head of the house of good bad repute, and the ever reliable Oscar Polk hovers on the sidelines.

Mr. Chaney has set the stage with splurging opulence, as he did, I suppose, both New Orleans and operetta, and Miss Sharaff's costumes, which are usually done with fastidious taste, seemed with two or three exceptions, disappointing.

The total effect is that of a journeyman job, synthetic and uninspired, which leaves me to suspect that "Sunny River" is the stream Mr. Sayo has been begging plaintively all these years to stay away from my door.



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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS



"Sunny River"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 5, 1941

'Sunny River,' Handsome Musical, Opens at the St. James Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ROMANCE has a handsome setting and a sweet sadness in "Sunny River," an operetta which opened last evening at the St. James. Tenors sing under the oleanders of old New Orleans and sopranos in lovely costumes beautifully answer them. The music of Sigmund Romberg is richly melodious and the book which Oscar Hammerstein 2d has contrived celebrates love eloquently. This is romance with a capital "R," and no nonsense. Romance being nothing to laugh at, nobody laughs much.

Mr. Hammerstein tells of a young man of the New Orleans of 1806, who married the daughter of his boss although he was devoted to a lovely cafe singer. Only trickery parted the true lovers, however, and when she was a famous opera singer and he one of the future rulers of the city they met again. Everything was about to be well lost for love when self-sacrifice reared its familiar head. Then, amid songs, the lovers parted for the last time and matrimony, rejuvenated by new understanding, took over. But the ending was not happy, for the tenor died in the siege of the city and left the two handsome ladies mourning him.

This, complicated by a few subplots and some gestures by Mr. Hammerstein toward social thinking—seems democracy was endangered in old New Orleans, too, and the hero almost took steps about it—makes a full book. And, as such things go, it is a reasonably coherent and pleasantly written book, with numerous nice speeches and intervals of pathos. And there is mighty little non-

sense, mind you—almost none of this joking around, either in words or music. Some comedy creeps into the second act, with a rather funny dueling scene, and there are faint traces of ribaldry. But neither the composer nor the librettist often wanders from the straight and narrow path of sweet romance.

Personally I like a little joking around, and, on occasion, even a little nonsense. So "Sunny River" seems to me very handsome, very good of its kind and not very lively. People who are fonder of being sung at will, I am sure, be happier. They will surely enjoy such songs as "Along the Winding Road," "Call It a Dream," "Let Me Live Today" and the title song, and the admirable singing of Bob Lawrence and Muriel Angelus, Helen Claire and Tom Ewell do most of the acting, and Mr. Ewell's acting provides almost all the humor. Howard Freeman is amusing in the few mo-

'SUNNY RIVER'

A musical in two acts; book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein 2d; music by Sigmund Romberg; settings by Stewart Chaney; costumes by Irene Sharaff; book staged by Mr. Hammerstein; production supervised by John Murray Anderson; presented at the St. James Theater on December 4, 1941, by Max Gordon. The cast:

Children	Carol Renee
Edwin	Joan Shepherd
Old Henry	Edwin Bruce Moldow
Aristide	Richard Huey
Muriel Gervais	Oscar Polk
Mother Gervais	Ainsworth Arnold
Jean Gervais	Ivy Scott
Jim	Bob Lawrence
Harry	Donald Clark
Emil	George Holmes
Emma	Gordon Dilworth
Lolita	Vicki Charles
George Marshall	Ethel Levey
Judge Pepe Martineau	Dudley Clements
Muriel Gervais	Frederick Pearson
Daniel Marshall	Muriel Angelus
Cecile Marshall	Tom Ewell
Watchman	Helen Claire
Madeleine Carrese	Byron Milligan
Martha	Joan Roberts
Harlequin	Peggy Alexander
Columbine	Jack Blano
Achille Carrese	Miriam LaVelle
The Drunk	William O'Neal
The Doctor	Howard Freeman
	Kenneth Tobay

ments allowed him, and Oscar Polk, who is practically everybody's favorite, wanders around looking, with too little success, for a moment or two in which to be funny.

Irene Sharaff's costumes and Stewart Chaney's settings are good-looking and bright and the whole affair has the polish of good theater. But don't expect too much frivolity, or, for that matter, too many catchy little tunes. You wouldn't be frivolous about love, would you? Mr. Hammerstein and Mr. Romberg wouldn't.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 5, 1941

"Sunny River," With a Good Score and a Distressing Book

"Sunny River," musical comedy by Oscar Hammerstein 2d, music by Sigmund Romberg. Produced by Max Gordon at the St. James Theatre, New York, Dec. 4, 1941.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

HERE is another test of your tolerance. If you can overlook one of the worst books with which a musical comedy has been burdened in recent years, you will find the music of "Sunny River" at the St. James fairly rewarding, and the production practically smothered in color and attractive scenery.

Producer Max Gordon, realizing the weaknesses of his entertainment, has very wisely scaled it at the \$3.30 rate of exchange, and comparatively, I suppose, it is some kind of a bargain at that figure.

At any rate it is pleasant to have Sigmund Romberg back threading his way lightly among the instruments of an orchestra, picking melodies out here and there and building singable ensembles.

It is nice to hear as agreeable voices as those of Muriel Angelus and Bob Lawrence, both comparatively new to the Broadway stage, and to have as sure an actress as Helen Claire to help them hold up the stupid story.

But—

But it is pretty disheartening to come at this late day upon another of those costume affairs in which the cast struts about sug-

gesting so many models at a fancy costume sale and talking about the romance of Jean and Marie, who loved and were separated and found each other again at little old No. 11 Levee St., only to have a noble sacrifice forced upon them in the end.

"Sunny River" was called "New Orleans" last Summer, when it was first tried at the Municipal Theatre in St. Louis. It is a story of an independent young tenor named Jean Gervais who picked a girl for himself at the Cafe des Oleanders, where the girls were

none too good, taking them as they came.

Jean's Marie was both good and ambitious. At first she spurned the \$5,000 offered to buy her off. But, after Cecile Marshall told her that Jean belonged to her (Cecile), she weakened and took the packet for Paris.

Five years later she came back, a great opera singer. Cecile defiantly invited her to the house and let her sing. Jean was charmed a second time, and itching to romp right back to old No. 11.

He did go back, in fact, only to find Cecile fainting on the steps in her red velvet gown. Irene Sharaff designed the costumes, and if there are any she overlooked they will never be missed. Handsome, colorful costumes they are, too, indicating that old New Orleans must have been amazingly clean and practically a continuous Mardi Gras all the way from the levee to the Gervais mansion.

Mr. Lawrence and Miss Angelus do most of the singing, and are happiest in their duets, "My Girl and I," "Let Me Live Today" and "Along the Winding Road." I suspect you will be hearing a lot of these songs.

There is little comedy, but what there is Tom Ewell takes care of modestly. Ethel Levey, who has been away for twenty years, has a role which gives her a chance to exhibit an amazing spryness. This both pleased and astonished a loyal section of the George M. Cohan Memory League last night.

Mr. Hammerstein staged his own book, and that, I feel, is one of the things that is wrong with it.

"Sunny River"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM, December 5, 1941

Sunny River, With Romberg Music and Hammerstein Book

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH wrapped up in shiny new paper and decorated with expensive ribbons, the parcel known as Sunny River proved at its opening last night to be anything but new. It left me, at any rate, feeling as if a valentine I had hoped had gone off the market years ago had been delivered in a Bergdorf-Goodman box by a messenger who thought he must be carrying a Christmas gift.

To say the evening depressed me would be to indulge in a form of understatement not habitual with this department. There may be those who prize the tradition revived in this musical romance with its book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein 2nd, and its liquid, lapping score by Sigmund Romberg. Certainly plenty of such admirers were on hand to welcome Sunny River at the St. James last night. But, even though no cherry trees are handy, I cannot tell a lie. I was unable to count myself among them.

When it comes to musical comedies I like them gay. I want them to be lively, full of color, wit and movement. I hate to have them take themselves too seriously and go in for all the pretensions of grand opera with nothing but sentimentality as their motive and dullness as their means. In other words, the operetta or musical romance which tries to be Puccini on a piccolo is no favorite form of mine.

The lovers who are always being separated bore me so unconsciously that the only fate

worse than death which I can dream of for them is that they should be brought together again. I despise the low comics with their wheezes that can be anticipated and are regretted. I feel uncomfortable in the presence of the atmospheric crowds of "villagers" or guests. I am embarrassed by those thumping numbers during which some Broadway chorus boys try to be more male than Ernest Hemingway. I don't like the old people who get too gay. Or the jokes which are as tasteless as chalk. Or the ridiculous song cues. Or the amorous duets when maple sugar begins to run in the shape of words and music. In fact, I do not relish anything about the whole bogus and outmoded ritual.

It seems only fair to make a clean confession of such personal prejudices at the out-

set when writing about Max Gordon's production because, in terms of New Orleans, 1806-1815, Sunny River happens to contain everyone of the ingredients which I most deplore. So if you are operetta-minded, don't read this. Look the other way as I found myself doing during a long evening. As I say, there were those who appeared happy. More than that, there were those who seemed delighted, and lapped it up as gratefully as if they had been handed the very lollipop for which they had been longing all these comparatively adult years.

Mr. Hammerstein's book tells how a man in old New Orleans is claimed by two girls. One of these is a young woman who works in a costume shop; the other is the bossy daughter of a leading citizen. The lady wins the gentleman in marriage by an antique lie; the professional goes abroad to become a great opera singer with home-instincts. Both women lose their man when he is killed in the Battle of New Orleans to the great offense admiration of Andy Jackson.

This tug-of-war starts Mr. Romberg's music cascading at a great rate. It is a duel played before some handsome settings by Irene Sharaff, some of which are extremely good and others extremely bad. Ethel Levey returns to the stage a bit too energetically as the proprietress of the ill-famed Cafe des Oleandres. Bob Lawrence sings excellently and acts well as the fought-over hero. Helen Claire struggles bravely as his wife. Muriel Angelus is in fine voice as the renunciant prima donna. Tom Ewell is given some regrettably unfortunate things to do as a comic Casanova. And Howard Freeman in one scene arouses more sympathy than laughter as a drunken bystander.

Although I would have thought American musical comedy had got well beyond the saphoric peevishness featured in Sunny River, I hope for everyone, concerned that I am wrong. As far as I could make out the evening began with dumb show and became dumber as it went along. I found it a giant bore. Or as one fellow rebel put it, old wine in old bottles.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 5, 1941

"Sunny River," an Operetta of Old New Orleans, at the St. James

By WILELLA WALDOFF

MAX GORDON made a noble gesture last night at the St. James Theatre. Mr. Gordon, apparently, feels that the time has come to bring operetta back to Broadway. A number of theatregoers, including this reviewer, agree with him heartily. We must admit, however, that if "Sunny River" is the best new operetta he could discover, it is not surprising that few producers these days are inclined to give much attention to this form of entertainment.

"Sunny River," which is laid in old New Orleans, from 1806 to 1815, with a stop-over in 1811, is bedecked with charming scenery by Stewart Chaney, and Irene Sharaff has dressed it beautifully, but Oscar Hammerstein has provided a stuffy and stilted book that was very hard going throughout the evening. Since many of the scenes, surprisingly enough, are rather clumsily staged, there is no dancing beyond a caper or two, and very mild comedy, the musical portion of the performance is the only thing that really matters after awhile.

Fortunately Bob Lawrence and Muriel Angelus can sing, and so can the chorus, especially the male portion of it. They do nicely by Sigmund Romberg's lavish score which is often very pretty, although it has, like so many operetta scores, a tendency to become monotonous. A brilliantly conceived production might have done wonders to lend variety to the song numbers, but "Sunny River" is not brilliantly conceived. It is pedestrian in many respects, patrician only in its background and the clothes it wears.

Cafe Romance

Mr. Hammerstein is telling the romantic

story of a young lawyer and a cafe singer in old New Orleans. They are about to marry and dwell blissfully in a little house on Levee Street when much plotting and trickery on the part of the lawyer's employer and his scheming daughter tear them apart. The cafe singer goes to Paris to take voice lessons, and the young man marries his employer's daughter. Five years later back comes the singer with an opera company, and there is a stiff, haughty, highly unbelievable scene in the middle of the inevitable reception. Faced with the problem of ending it all somehow Mr. Hammerstein has turned to history for inspiration. He places his final scene in 1815, and brings down the curtain on the two females, wife and opera singer, united at the Cafe des Oleandres, shedding genteel tears over the memory of their beloved, killed in the Battle of New Orleans.

A few futile attempts to raise a cheer for democracy by making the young lawyer a

champion of American principles as Louisiana joins the Union are evident from time to time, but for the most part Mr. Hammerstein's book and lyrics are notable chiefly for romantic sentiment and desperate attempts at humor. Tom Ewell, an engaging young actor with a funny face, nearly worked his frills off trying to raise a laugh out of the material provided, and it is to his everlasting credit that he succeeded now and then in causing a ripple of merriment. Oscar Polk, the Negro comedian, was so completely wasted during the evening that we began to recall some of his remarks in past plays, and had quite a merry time doing it. Late in the evening Howard Freeman turned up as a drunken gentleman, and he too was starved for lines. Just the glimpse of him, however, reminded us of some of the scenes he played until recently in "Cuckoos on the Hearth" and they amused us until the curtain finally fell.

The Evening's Bon Mot

The comedy in "Sunny River" is so generally uninspired that when Mr. Ewell asked Vicki Charles where she'd been keeping herself, and she replied: "What makes you think I've been keeping myself?" the audience was vastly diverted. It was the bon mot of the evening.

The singing honors went to Bob Lawrence as the fascinating legal light adored by two ladies. Mr. Lawrence sings well and looks well, though his acting is on the stiffish side. Miss Angelus, seen here previously in "The Boys From Syracuse," takes her higher notes cleanly, clouding up a bit below. As the scheming Southern girl who gets her man, Helen Claire does what she can with a spiteful, snooty part. An actress of experience, she confines her efforts to being dramatic and is not called upon to warble.

The ovation of the evening went to Ethel Levey when she swept downstairs as Lolita of the Cafe des Oleandres. Miss Levey has been away from Broadway since 1932 and her friends in the audience gave her a big welcome. She acknowledged the applause graciously with many bows and smiles, and later on waxed as merry as it is possible to wax in such a work as "Sunny River."

"Sunny River"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 5, 1941

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Sunny River"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NO PEOPLE can make a musical comedy seem so much like a matter of duty as Sigmund Romberg and Oscar Hammerstein 2d. Following a venerable pattern they have put together a workmanlike item labeled "Sunny River," which was sung at the St. James last evening. Every element of romance is put into its proper place in the book and the score goes through a polite sequence of heavily orchestrated numbers, repeating the sentimental themes in dreamy meditations and winding up with a roar of thirty or thirty-five voices for devastating climaxes.

Fortunately, Mr. Hammerstein and Mr. Romberg have retired to New Orleans in the early nineteenth century to separate their lovers and torture hearts to slow-motion music. Stewart Chaney has seized upon the occasion to design some airy and entrancing patios with stairways, pillars and stunning furniture, and Irene Sharaff has dressed the men and women in gorgeous costumes full of color. When "Sunny River" opens with a pictorial overture along a watercolor street and a parade of Delta finery, a playgoer in the temperate zone loosens his tie, sits back in

his seat and prepares to luxuriate.

"Call It a Dream," the soprano sings as she comes down the stairs of a cultured bachelorette, and "It Can Happen to Any One" she sighs as she thinks of her lover. What is bound to happen is that the boss' daughter wants to marry the hero, which makes it impossible for him to church the heroine. "Sunny River" shows how wealth and social standing murder love. If the boss' daughter had not lied to Marie Sauvignat at the end of the first act Jean Gervais would have followed

the natural promptings of his heart and married for love. In these melancholy circumstances he marries for wealth and advancement and degenerates into flabby contentment until Marie returns, a glamorous, love-sick opera singer, and they begin all over again.

Meanwhile, Mr. Romberg is industriously winding up his barrel organ, and every instrument in the orchestra is hard at work. "Along the Winding Road" the lovers sing romantically, and the lover frugally picks it up again a half hour later. "The Butterflies and the Bees" the humorists sing to celebrate the facts of life, and two of them sing it again in case you have forgotten it. "Can You Sing" is a song with genuine spirit, and Muriel Angelus manages to sing it well in the upper register. And "Sunny River" is also an excellent carnival tune. But most of Mr. Romberg's music is ponderous and pedestrian. It conveys a vast respect for the art of music without conveying emotion.

Bob Lawrence is a handsome hero who can also sing to some purpose. As the madame of the gentlemen's club, Ethel Levey is returning to Broadway after nearly twenty years, and in good spirits, too. Helen Claire plays the Southern flower with a terrifying will of iron, and Tom Ewell grapples affably with the comedy relief. In the grateful part of a warm-climate cocotte, Joan Roberts is a delightful Oscar Polk shuffles humorously through the play, dropping an occasional amusing line out of his pouting lips. As Harlequin and Columbine, Jack Riano and Miriam LaVelle introduce a spin of dance when it is urgently needed.

For most of "Sunny River" is paying a duty call on entertainment. Its deportment is correct, but it is not really interested.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 5, 1941

In Old New Orleans

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THIS time the theater is in a wistfully romantic mood, singing us a lugubrious little story about star-crossed lovers in Andrew Jackson's New Orleans. The occasion is an operetta called "Sunny River," the work of Sigmund Romberg and Oscar Hammerstein 2d, and my guess is that you will have to be quite a red-hot partisan for this type of entertainment if you are to find any pleasure in it. For, despite a couple of pleasant songs and an attractively colorful production, this fourth of the enterprising Max Gordon's current productions is a dull and commonplace musical show that is bowed down under the weight of its stencils.

With sobs in their voices and a few leers in their eyes, the Messrs. Romberg and Hammerstein are telling us the sad story of the dashing young Creole named Jean Gervais, who married the wrong girl and finally died heroically at the Battle of New Orleans. This, I should tell you, constitutes a happy ending, since poor Jean was in a quandary at the time of his demise. Tricked into marriage with a

woman he didn't love, he finds himself lyrically upset when his real sweetheart comes back to Louisiana, a great opera singer. He thought for a while of going off with her, but she was a sacrificial girl and again gave him up to the loveless wife.

Naturally there was nothing for the poor fellow to do but moon about New Orleans

singing romantic songs, and so it must have been quite as much of a relief to him as it was to some of the rest of us when he perished offstage at the head of his troops. When the authors are not being sentimental and dreamy about the plight of their hero and his two women they are studying the sex life of his brother-in-law, a comic, and they aren't much more entertaining when they are doing that. When the plot isn't going on and the comedy lags, the new Romberg score is prettily sung. As I have noted there are one or two nice pieces in it, but, as a whole, the music struck me as being both conventional and synthetic.

Everything is so routine about this love-lorn saga that those entangled in the leading roles are pretty much handicapped. Nevertheless, Bob Lawrence, who is by no means to be confused with the Herald Tribune's erudite music observer of the same name, is a vocally interesting hero; Miss Muriel Angelus is successfully statuesque as the hapless opera singer, and Miss Helen Claire moves expertly from villainy to heroism as the scheming wife. A good comedian, Tom Ewell, gets far more out of the role of the amorous brother-in-law than the part deserves, and my favorite actor, Oscar Polk, is, of course, wonderful in a bit that wastes his talent. Stewart Chaney's sets and Irene Sharaff's costumes are helpful, but "Sunny River" is a weary sort of operetta.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 5, 1941

The Girl of the Golden Bordello

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

NOBODY is really unhappy about the fate that the horse met, some years ago, at the hands of the automobile, but we all hanker at moments after a good old buggy ride. Too big a dose of slicked-up musical comedy can make us sigh a little, too, for the old high-busted, full-throated operetta that wore its

romance as proudly as a jewel, and let its melodies sweep the air like plumes.

The frequent trouble with the buggy ride is that you think of a smartly varnished trap behind spanking horses, when more likely than not the buggy had jouncing springs and the horse was a nag. And the operetta—well, "Sunny River" is as full-blown and high-romanced as anything produced in the old days, but it turns out to be something less than an unalloyed delight. There are a lot of things that nostalgia makes us forget about.

One very important thing, for example, is the plot. Of maybe the plot of "Sunny River" is not to be pinned on the past, but only on Mr. Hammerstein. In any case he has concocted a lush tale of old New Orleans, in which a young man's romance and prospective marriage with a charming young lady from a bordello is blasted by a scheming belle who wants him for herself. She fakes a sob story, and his fiancée nobly renounces him. Years later he and his lost love, now a famous opera singer, are all ready to elope, when the wife does a pass-out and the lady nobly renounces him again. More years pass, but Mr. Hammerstein remains as inexorable as he is tedious. For his hero dies in the War of 1812, and all his heroine can do at the end

is to divvy up the dead man's sword and sash with his wife.

But a terribly long-winded plot isn't the only thing we're in for. There is the dialogue, some of it stilted, some of it fancy, some of it arch. And there's the humor, prattling and skittish and schoolboy by turns, and in one scene, which features a drunk, actually reminiscent of the moiliest humor in Shakespeare's poorest comedies.

All this bulks much too large, I'm afraid, for Stewart Chaney's picturesque sets and Irene Sharaff's brilliant costumes and even Mr. Romberg's warm and sometimes winning melodies to redeem. The music at its best is rich and romantic, with plenty of happy glissando-ing and big operatic finales, though a bit lacking in variety, and sometimes pretty florid. On the whole, however, it's very pleasant music; the only question is—as it is with fish that tastes good but is terribly full of bones and sometimes with the trouble that goes with it?

In the principal roles Muriel Angelus and Bob Lawrence proved very attractive to look at and listen to. Helen Claire handled the ungrateful role of the wife adequately; Tom Ewell was as amusing as a lame comedy part would permit; and Ethel Levey, returning to Broadway after an absence of 20 years, showed that she still could be lively.

"Twelfth Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM," December 3, 1941

'Twelfth Night,' Chekhov-Style Is Just Much Ado About Nothing

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I VE never been sure which is worse with Shakespeare's comedies on the stage—too dull a production, or too lively a one. The faults of dullness are, at any rate, negative: they give no pleasure, but they cause no pain. A giddy, hyper-thyroid liveliness, on the other hand, can result in reactions that the august name of Shakespeare would scarcely suggest. There is something pretty gruesome about an *As You Like It* or a *Twelfth Night* that tries to convert its lame, worn-out jests into mountainous belly laughs, and that goes skipping and bounding in all directions, as though mere motion guaranteed merriment, and activity meant acting.

Last night's production seemed to me another attempt to make Shakespeare the life of the party, something that not only can't be done but that shouldn't be tried. *Twelfth Night*, in the theater, is always a pretty thankless job; but if anyone insists on attempting it, it is better—as Margaret Webster did last

year—to give it the easy, artificial tone of the masque than to toss it, all wound up like a mechanical toy, into your lap. Last night some of the characters seemed to be playing tag with one another. Feste flew about like a bird and Sir Andrew cackled away like a

chicken; while the duel scene was a positive orgy of horseplay.

All this, far from seeming lusty, had for me a very pronounced falsetto quality; only at moments in some of the Malvolio episodes could one be at all amused. The production blundered in other ways, too. The first half of the story was so pieced together that anyone ignorant of it probably remained so. The stagecraft, throughout, was—to say the least of it—eccentric. There was no real scenery—only some odds and ends that were meant to create atmosphere but, instead, created confusion. Scenes were shifted (with the curtain up) by costumed creatures who peeked cutely from behind the props they were carrying, and skipped about just as cutely while they were setting them up. The principal props were a thing that resembled a ballot box, and some lengths of heavy curtaining that were mounted and displayed in a manner that suggested, more than anything else, the "drapes" department of Lord & Taylor's. The whole thing not only created no stage illusion, but made for some very odd actor groupings and some even odder exits and entrances.

Most of the performances were indifferent or worse, probably owing to the direction; but Beatrice Straight made an attractive-looking and fairly forthright Viola. Ford Rainey a passable Sir Toby, and Sam Schatz, though he did not bring the part of Malvolio off—achieved some effective moments and seemed to perceive better than he could express what the character should be. For no good reason he was made to look, however, like Don Quixote.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 3, 1941

Some Shakespeare

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

THE ambitious young actors who call themselves the Chekhov Theater Players are, in their way, an admirable lot. Filled with a high devotion to the drama, they carry its message to the far corners of the nation, offering productions of their plays in towns and villages of the land where the stage is rarely, if ever, to be encountered. These hardy pioneers dart about the countryside by station wagon, if not pony express, and their ministrations are so idealistic and devoted that they deserve approval for their spirit of adventure and admiration for their crusading zeal. But I wish that they hadn't brought their version of "Twelfth Night" to New York. After all, we do see the theatre here occasionally.

Getting down to details, we have even seen "Twelfth Night" in this vicinity. In fact, some of us encountered it in the presentation that Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans offered last year, under the direction of Margaret Webster. Enthusiasts for the Chekhov Players have told me that the current edition was superior to the Hayes-Evans-Webster offering because it went in extensively for the

comic values of the Elizabethan frolic, and made them seem beautifully uncorrupted. That it does stress the comedy aspects is certainly true; that it makes them genuinely funny is more open to doubt. In fact, it is my guess that these dubious sources of humor have never appeared more lacking in gaiety than they do in the Chekhov version.

The almost inescapable fact about "Twelfth Night" is that its festive antics have become

unbearably tedious to most of us, but that a certain dewy, youthful charm, which clings gracefully of the morning of the world, clings to it and gives it its surviving value of beauty and sweetness. When a production forgets the loveliness to concentrate on the highly questionable comedy, it is throwing away the virtue of a classic to give us the frailties. The story of Viola and her love still has something sweet about it; the tale of the baiting of Malvolio is now just a bore, and an embarrassing sort of bore, at that. As for those scenes of hilarity between Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, they are almost epically unfunny.

It must be said for the Chekhov production that it is brief and to the point. In truth, I suppose you could go so far as to call it streamlined. It merely happens that Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are dull fellows, that the scene of the baited steward in the madhouse reaches a Shakespearean nadir and that Malvolio, who used to be intended as an unsympathetic character, now seems merely an unfortunate fellow who didn't find the two merry knights, the Olsen and Johnson of their day, funny. The current version might have been wiser if it had realized that and had not concentrated so heavily on these aspects of the play. It probably is not the fault of the evening that there is no Helen Hayes, Maurice Evans, or even a rough equivalent of them, present.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 3, 1941

The Chekhov Players Revive 'Twelfth Night' at the Little Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE Chekhov Theater Players, who have grown up in Michael Chekhov's studio in Ridgefield, romped down to New York last evening and acted Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" all over the stage of the Little Theater. More precisely, they acted scenes from "Twelfth Night," with impertinent interpolations and high spirited irreverence. They sport false beards and false noses and often act extravagantly. And for the most part, they are fun to watch.

Mr. Chekhov has devised a production which is simple and fluid. The curtain falls only between the two acts in which the comedy has been arranged. Scene changes are made with portable hangings and screens, wafted on and off by amusing youngsters in servant costume. This sounds a little precious, but in performance amounts to unassuming simplicity. It also keeps things moving, which is always pleasant in the theater

and doubly pleasant in Shakespearean comedy. Not always so wisely, they have cut the text ruthlessly and, where it seemed wise, filled out with little chirps and laughs and disjointed ad libbing.

Particularly in the earlier scenes, Mr. Chekhov has stressed the grotesque in a manner to remind almost any one that he once directed for the Moscow Art. The Russian note, particularly the Russian horse-play note, comes in rather often, in fact. And sometimes it, in turn, reminds you that really spontaneous horse-play is rarely attained on the stage and never except by experts. This "Twelfth Night" is too often juvenile in its cavortings and sometimes the laughter on the stage quite drowned out the chorles of an extremely friendly audience.

In the acting there is much broad caricature. Sam Schatz, for example, plays Malvolio fully and amusingly, but in his interpretation the butt of the play is not so much a pompous ass as an avowed idiot. It is hard to overdo Sir Andrew, and Hurd Hatfield's interpretation is, for a while at any rate, comic. But it is also burlesque. To broaden the characters in this fashion, and particularly so to broaden Malvolio, has the odd result of minimizing the play. (If a man is no more than a fool to start with, you can't very well make a fool out of him.) And in some instances excessive make-up hampers actors; it hampers Alan Harkness, for example, in playing Feste.

But in spite of numerous faults, high spirits and gaiety come out of the group's "Twelfth Night." And in Beatrice Straight's playing of Viola there are simplicity and directness and an unforced humor that give direction to the whole production. Count it all as a pleasant little frolic, in the theater's asset column.

"Twelfth Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 3, 1941

Chekhov Players Have Fun Playing In "Twelfth Night"

"Twelfth Night," comedy by William Shakespeare. Revived by the Chekhov Studio at the Little Theatre, New York, Dec. 2, 1941.

By BURNS MANTLE

THE Chekhov Studio revival of "Twelfth Night," which has been trouping the campus circuits the last two years, dared its Broadway test at the Little Theatre last night. It is an adventure that took a bit of courage, but it came off rather well.

This, as its promoters admit, is a studio production, with professional trimmings. It is also a novel production in that that scenery as the students employ is carried in by hand and set against an encircling curtain of gray velvet.

These scenic properties are rich, rare and handsome, consisting of velvet banner screens in pastel shades, a couple of throne chairs, and decorative boxwood trees that Sir Toby, Maria and Aguecheek can carry about with them while they are pretending to hide from the simpering Malvollo.

There are also a kitchen flat or two and barred windows to represent the jail from which Malvollo pleads for help from his hecklers.

Same Old Farce

"Twelfth Night," as you know, is the Shakespearean comedy that you have to forgive a lot to like a little. Four-fifths of it is as silly stuff as any Elizabethan ever concocted to amuse yokel audiences, though it was written as a festival play for the "benchers" of Middle Temple in London.

It has been saved in revival by the popularity of its leading players, even as it was saved last season by Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans at the St. James Theatre.

In this studio revival there are no names to conjure with. The actors are earnest players of little experience outside their laboratory work.

The chief of them, and the most attractive, is the Beatrice Straight who plays the Viola. Miss Straight, it seems to me, is having more fun playing theatre than any other person I know.

Nice Hobby

Acting and play production are her passion and she has the means to indulge it. The Chekhov

"TWELFTH NIGHT"

Shakespeare's comedy arranged in two acts; production devised by Michael Chekhov; directed by Mr. Chekhov and George Shandoff; music by Joseph R. Wood, Jr. Presented at the Little Theatre on December 2, 1941, by the Chekhov Theater Players. The cast:

Viola.....Beatrice Straight
Sea Captain.....Frank Rader
Sebastian.....Ronald Bennett
Second Sea Captain.....Charles Barnett
Orsino.....John Flynn
Curio.....Nelson Harrell
Valentine.....Lester Bacharach
Sir Toby Belch.....Ford Rainey
Maria.....Mary Haynesworth
Sir Andrew Aguecheek.....Hurd Hatfield
Feste.....Alan Harkness
Malvollo.....Sam Schatz
Olivia.....Mary Lou Taylor
Fabian.....Youl Bryner
Servants—Daphne Moore, Eleanor Barrie, Alfred Boylen, Margaret Boylen and Penelope Marshall.

hov Studio, under the direction of Michael Chekhov, nephew of the great Anton, was organized and, I understand, subsidized by her. Unlike so many similar enterprises it has endured over a period of years, and has risen to professional standing on its tours of the college towns of the West. You may recall its production of "Possessed," a year back at the Lyceum, which had its striking points.

Miss Straight has not neglected to improve her art as the studio has grown, and is now persuasively gentle and interesting actress. Her Viola is even more frankly feminine than most, but nicely spoken and pleasing in picture.

In support the Sir Toby of Ford Rainey and the Maria of Mary Haynesworth are the most satisfying performances. Hurd Hatfield overdid Aguecheek as a cadaverous freak, and John Flynn swallowed most of what the sappy Orsino has to say. Not that that matters greatly to anyone save John, the student.

There are two particularly well staged scenes. The kitchen revel is fun and the duel scene, taken over at the end by Sir Toby and Sebastian, offers both good fencing and an exciting moment. The revel at the close is also played through with good spirit.

Last night's audience was friendly and evidently familiar with the work of the student group. Frequently there were shouts of delight from the balcony and a single wealthy demonstration followed the final curtain.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, December 3, 1941

'12th Night' Staged by Chekhov Players

Group Presents Shakespeare's Comedy Here After
Touring 15 States

By JOHN ANDERSON

SINCE Helen Hayes, Maurice Evans, Margaret Webster, Gilbert Miller and the Theatre Guild all conspired in a sort of League of Nations to produce Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" last season, your chairman would entertain a motion to consider it produced and leave it at that. It seemed generally conceded that even under those azure five-power auspices the dull face of boredom peeked now and then from behind Master Will's romantic gaiety, and that, as usual with the Bard, nothing could be done about it.

I mention this to measure the task the Chekhov Theatre Players set themselves at the Little Theatre last night when they elected to stop over in New York on a tour that has already included 15 States. They go enthusiastically by station wagon, changing tires, parts, and so on, I suppose, as they go, and I can only wish that before deciding on "Twelfth Night," they had also changed their minds.

For setting aside all comparisons, the players are simply not up to the rigorous demands of Elizabethan comedy. With one or two exceptions, they lack the authority it takes to animate the characters and the style and

poise to hold them in focus. They have, it is true, developed a certain stage easiness from playing together, but quite often this quality, as valuable as it is, doesn't achieve the final value of translating Shakespeare's comedy in terms of formal performance.

Developing Teamwork

It takes time, of course to develop an acting company and, given the raw material, the

only known way to go about it is to act. This system may be tough on audiences now and then, but since there seems to be no substitute method, the Chekhov Players are doubtless as sensible as they are determined.

Eight of the players in the present company appeared in New York two years ago in the ill-advised and disastrous production of "The Possessed." Since then, the group has been weeded out and new names added. Under the direction of Michael Chekhov, nephew of the great Anton, they have worked at Ridgefield, Conn., in the studio school transplanted from Dartington Hall, in England, at the outbreak of war.

The group's high-minded purpose may be weighed critically against its obvious shortcomings, even if it means nothing on Broadway, where the present production would seem to belong not in the commercial theatre, but in a school.

Appalling Make Up

A few of the players came off moderately well, particularly Ford Rainey, whose Sir Toby Belch, in spite of appalling makeup, had some robustness and life. Beatrice Straight made an attractive if not very lively or persuasive Viola. Ronald Bennett a vigorous Sebastian, and Sam Schatz suggested the unctuous pretensions of Malvollo without hitting the humorous inflation that is needed, especially in the midst of the cruel prank that is played on him.

Much of the direction seemed more horse-play than truly spirited, and the costumes for a play that begs for sunshine apparel and cleave gaiety seemed dreadfully uninteresting. The small pieces of scenery (suitable for station wagons) are moved before the audience by a sort of chorus of costumed stagehands, who peered coyly over the settings now and then to see if the actors were through.

Invariably, they were.

"Twelfth Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 3, 1941

"Twelfth Night" Produced by The Chekhov Theatre Players

By WILLELLA WALDORF

THE Chekhov Theatre Players, who make their headquarters at Michael Chekhov's Theatre Studio near Ridgefield, Conn., interrupted their touring season last night to open a limited engagement in Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" at the Little Theatre. Most of the actors are still in the student stage of their theatrical careers, and according to a notice in the program it is the policy of the players not to star or feature any particular performer, since the company wishes to be judged as an entity. Important though the individual performance is, they believe that ensemble acting is the highest development of the theatrical art.

Michael Chekhov and George Shadoff, who directed the production, have cut the text vigorously, eliminating both Sea Captains after a brief glimpse by way of prologue, rendering Sebastian's role even smaller than it was in the beginning, and generally making room for strong emphasis on the horse-play of the Sir Toby Belch contingent, and introducing a prodigious amount of dueling in the later scenes. Ford Rainey, who plays Sir Toby, is fencing master at the Chekhov Studio, and he puts on a rough-and-tumble exhibition of sword-play with some of his pupils who happen to be acting such roles as Viola, Sebastian, Fabian and Sir Andrew Aguecheek. We should not have been overly surprised to see the Lady Olivia herself seize a rapier and have at her wheezing kinsman, but she managed to hold herself in check.

There is precious little poetry left in this production of "Twelfth Night," for none of the company is as yet sufficiently brilliant at reading Shakespearean lines to bring out the music in them, but when the rolisterers at Olivia's house forgather below stairs they

whoop it up mightily with what is probably an excellent example of ensemble acting, and when the dueling begins in Olivia's Garden, there's as much excitement as if somebody had absentmindedly inserted a couple of scenes from Sabatini into the proceedings.

Plenty of Belly Laughs

This reviewer has been lulled into slumber by so many dull productions of "Twelfth Night," which is hardly one of the Bard's best comedies in any case, that we are inclined to welcome any version of the play that manages to be at least sporadically amusing. The Chekhov Players' version is a little self-conscious now and then and the acting is sometimes pretty amateurish, but it does keep you awake.

Last night's audience, in fact, became increasingly boisterous as the evening progressed. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew were wows. Feste garnered more laughs than any Shakespearean clown we have encountered in

years, while Malvolio and Maria had the place in stitches. Some idea of the general tenor of the evening may be gathered from the fact that even Orsino got several belly laughs. A highly localized burst of applause greeted the Fool's assertion that "Many a good hanging has prevented a bad marriage," and when the curtain finally fell, the audience was whistling and stamping like a crowd at a ball game.

Since the company is accustomed to traveling all over remote parts of the country in station wagons, the scenery and properties are necessarily of a simple, easily shifted sort. A chummy, informal air is lent to the proceedings from the beginning for all of the effects are shifted around without lowering the curtain by the actors themselves. When Sir Toby falls asleep in Olivia's wine cellar, he has to be waked up and kicked out because it's being changed into Orsino's palace by removing a couple of screens and substituting a series of satin displays that were a trifle confusing at first, but seemed all right once you got over the impression of moving day in Lord and Taylor's Drapery Department.

Chopping Up the Text

In some respects, Mr. Chekhov, by hacking up the text, may have rendered the plot a trifle more idiotic than usual, but in others he has made it more understandable. One reason, for instance, for Olivia's boredom with Orsino's persistent suit may have been the messengers he sent before young Cesario turned up. Usually these messengers are just messengers, but in Mr. Chekhov's version of the play Orsino is waited on by tottering octogenarians apparently in the last stages of senile decay.

Shakespearean purists accustomed to quoting the authorities and taking an authentic text of the play to check up during the performance will probably be shocked into insensibility at the Chekhov company's version of "Twelfth Night." This department, however, feels very broadminded on the subject of this particular comedy. We wouldn't turn a hair of Gypsy Rose Lee decided to burlesque it or Bill Robinson took a notion to swing it. Directors may cut up the text into paper dolls for all we care.

Since the Chekhov company wishes to be recognized and judged as an entity, we won't be indelicate enough to comment on any of the players as individuals.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 3, 1941

Chekhov Theater Players Romp Through Twelfth Night

By JOHN MASON BROWN

TWELFTH NIGHT is not an easy play either to produce or to accept. It reads better than it acts. It is a romantic comedy which when placed upon a contemporary stage is apt to have its low comedy trip up its romance.

If the blend of the two, so blessed in the classrooms, ceases to exist behind the footlights, the reasons are not hard to find. First of all, there is the plot; that plot which at the time of the Hayes-Evans revival last year Wolcott Gibbs insisted was as irritating as a raspberry seed stuck in a back tooth; that plot about identical twins (except for sex) with "one face, one voice, one habit, and two persons" which was so dear to the Elizabethans and is so difficult for us.

Then, there is the lyricism of the Orsino scenes which few actors playing the Duke are able to suggest. Next, there is Feste, a Shakespearean clown calculated to try a modern audience almost as much as he tries the man who attempts him. Then, there is what, by current standards, is the unbearably shabby treatment to which Malvolio is subjected when he is mocked as a madman. And, finally, there are Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, two low comics whose antics can be and usually are made so loutish out of

sheer desperation that nowadays they can come across as the last word in resolute dullness.

If these difficulties in Twelfth Night were not entirely solved even when the play was directed last season by Margaret Webster with Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans as its stars, it was scarcely to be expected that the Chekhov Theatre Players would find a more satisfactory solution to them.

The Chekhov Theatre Players are a band of young actors, dedicated to a belief in the en-

semble. Their director is Michael Chekhov, a nephew of the great playwright, and a distinguished graduate of the Moscow Art Theatre. Ridgefield, Conn., is now the home of their studio experiments as a group. It was these same Chekhov Theater Players who some seasons back were ill-advised enough to invade New York with an over-stylized production of *The Possessed*, a drama, derived from Dostoevsky's novel, which offered more smiles than shudders.

They fare better with Shakespeare than they did with Dostoevsky. Even so their performance leaves much to be desired. It is more Russian than English in its horseplay. The verbal beauties of the text are cut, subdued, or ignored in the interests of a heavy-handed romp. The evening belongs to Sir Toby and his crew; to them and to the stagehands who take more time moving a few properties and satin curtains about than it must have taken Sir Beerbohm Tree to have his heaviest realistic settings changed.

Some of the make-ups are so heavily bewigged that they suggest the comedy could only have been written by a Russian who had lived before Peter the Great placed his ban on beards. What music the evening has is pleasantly supplied by Joseph Wood rather than by Shakespeare. The most outstanding individual performance is Ford Rainey's Sir Toby Belch. By the time of the duel scene he succeeds in emerging from behind his make-up to capture some of the unctious and groff courage of the man.

One virtue, and a rare one, the production does possess. It may not preserve the felicities of the script. Its emphasis may be on laughs, however desperate. And it may not include any outstanding performers. But its players are actors who have learned how to act together. They have achieved an ensemble even if they have failed Twelfth Night and it has failed them.

"Twelfth Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 3, 1941

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Twelfth Night"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Shakespeare might have some difficulty in recognizing his romantic comedy in the version of "Twelfth Night" played at the Little last evening, he would doubtless be interested. "Or, What You Will," he obligingly scribbled on his manuscript for subtitle. And what Michael Chekhov and George Shdanoff have willed is a highly improvised gambol in which Sir Toby Belch emerges as hero. For the Chekhov Theatre actors, have been playing fast and loose with Shakespeare's sweet-tempered masquerade and the realistic conventions of the modern theatre. Put their sketch-book version down as a tour de force worth paying some attention to.

If they can make a merry antic out of an ancient playbook, they have everyone's full permission. In a frolicsome spirit they have confined the scenery to movable masks that can be massed in many convenient shapes, and to stylized boxwood trees and an itinerant balcony. The scenery is changed before your eyes by a group of willing servants. In the interest of pure make-believe the characters of one scene are sometimes carried over to the next like tardy scholars who are not keeping pace with the action of the play. Mr. Chekhov

and Mr. Shdanoff are staging "Twelfth Night" as if it were a masque for diversion out of doors on any midsummer night's eve.

Since the theatre sorely needs new ways to attack old problems, the Chekhov Players experiment is in the right direction. And when festive-minded Sir Toby and Maria have the stage, this version has both weight and gaiety and it is wholly delightful. Sir Toby is played by Ford Rainey, who has a resonant voice and a frank, direct style of acting. Maria is played by Mary Haynesworth with honest

mischievousness which the Chekhov Players have not altogether escaped. The improvisations are often too studied and thus lack spontaneity. The tone of the performance is sometimes precious and ingrown. There is a certain tea-table flavor to scenes of artifice. And it must be confessed that the story of "Twelfth Night," which Shakespeare was too busy to explain three times, as is customary in the theatre, gets short shrift in this production. Mr. Chekhov and Mr. Shdanoff assume that you know how Viola got into boy's dress and why, for their introductory exposition, spoken before music, is whisked on and off before you know it.

But the frolicsome style also has weaknesses which the Chekhov Players have not altogether escaped. The improvisations are often too studied and thus lack spontaneity. The tone of the performance is sometimes precious and ingrown. There is a certain tea-table flavor to scenes of artifice. And it must be confessed that the story of "Twelfth Night," which Shakespeare was too busy to explain three times, as is customary in the theatre, gets short shrift in this production. Mr. Chekhov and Mr. Shdanoff assume that you know how Viola got into boy's dress and why, for their introductory exposition, spoken before music, is whisked on and off before you know it.

Romance and idealized beauty also take time. Beatrice Straight is playful and graceful and attractive candor, and John Flynn is playing Orsino with gentlemanly pride of character; both parts are very well acted. But the bustle and sportiveness of the performance as a whole work against the romantic interludes of "Twelfth Night," and the lyricism of the verse is lost in the footloose scenery. Not all of Shakespeare's comedy fits the pattern. Mr. Chekhov and Mr. Shdanoff have applied to it. Bless them, "Twelfth Night," how art thou translated! Call it the "Merry Adventures of Sir Toby Belch" and you can take a pleasant little holiday from the routine of hit-and-flop playgoing.

"Sons o' Fun"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 2, 1941

'Sons o' Fun,' a New Olsen and Johnson, Is Offered at the Winter Garden

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

WEARING the bulletproof vest which is standard equipment among "Hellzapoppin'" veterans and carrying a small flag of truce, this correspondent visited the Winter Garden last evening and risked life and sanity to get news of "Sons o' Fun." "Sons o' Fun" is a new version of Olsen and Johnson, the blank cartridge comedians, and about half of it takes place in the aisles. There's absolutely no place to hide, either.

To start with, they've arranged things so that you enter by way of the stage. You merge from the wings, which are full of skeletons and light cables and clowns, and then you cross it several times and try not to fall off moving platforms and if you are of the skirt-wearing gender you hold your skirts down against gusts of air. This journey, which delights those who got their earlier and are sitting out front laughing their heads off, is carefully supervised and you are really not at all apt to break your neck. During this adventure, you are not actually shot at. The shooting comes later.

It comes with the arrival of Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson, who never appear on stage without fireworks. They have firecrackers and automatics and, for all I know, field artillery, and after twenty minutes of frolic the air is heavy with the smell of cordite. The air is also filled with startled pigeons. An actor is suspended near the ceiling and that anxious woman who cried out for Oscar for so many years, is still trying to find him, although

conditions have changed somewhat. Frank Libuse helps as chief usher and directs a couple of stooges to a ladder, on which they climb into a box. Mr. Libuse, who is very funny, come to think of it, also acts as a maddened orchestra leader.

The auditorium is either as light as the stage or as dark as pitch and full of things flying around like bats. The chorus girls come out and brave gentlemen, including Al Smith, dance with them in the aisles and go up on the stage finally and end up by trying to get back their own coats. This correspondent, as a neutral, escaped that. Beans are thrown down the backs of necks and chewing gum is distributed and people sitting next to you get up and start to take off their clothes. All right, it is "Hellzapoppin'."

'SONS O' FUN'

A musical in two acts, conceived by Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson; songs by Jack Yellen and Sam E. Fain; dances and ensembles directed by Robert Altou; scenery and costumes by Raoul Fene DuBois; staged and lighted by Edward Duryea Dowling; supervised by Harry Kaufman; presented at the Winter Garden on December 1, 1941, by the Messrs. Shubert. In the cast, in addition to Messrs. Olsen and Johnson, are Carmen Miranda, Ella Logan, Frank Libuse, Rosario and Antonio, the Pitchmen, Joe Besser, Lionel Kaye, Walton and O'Rourke, the Blitmorettes, Ben Beri, Margo Brander and others.

Along with this, or against this as you choose, there is Carmen Miranda, absolutely in person and as fascinating as she was a couple of years ago when she knocked us all in rows. There is Ella Logan, a gay and engaging young woman, and a fine dancing team named Rosario and Antonio. There are pretty girls, on stage and off; there is Joe Besser, who is pretty comical, and there is never a moment to draw breath. There are even songs, and some of them are sprightly, and the dancing girls know superior capers.

It is good looking, thanks to Raoul Fene DuBois, and violent, and moves at a speed so terrific that there is no time to wonder whether the gags are really as funny as, to Olsen and Johnson particularly, they seem. It's pretty funny, anyway, and noisy and brash and almost, so far as I can see, a replica of "Hellzapoppin'." "Hellzapoppin'" obviously is going to run forever; so, no doubt, will "Sons o' Fun" and its successor, and eventually all the theaters in town will be filled with Olsen and Johnson and there will be no ammunition left for wars. And this department, shell-shocked already, will be off somewhere in a nice, quiet cave, and hearing no malice—only remembering, wistfully, the good old days when musical shows stayed on the stage and didn't throw things at the audience.

"Sons o' Fun"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 2, 1941

"Sons O' Fun," a New Olsen and Johnson Show, Reaches Broadway

By WILLELLA WALDORF

OLSEN and Johnson, inventors of "Hellzapoppin," came back to the Winter Garden last night with its successor, a new "crazy musical" entitled "Sons O' Fun." "Hellzapoppin" itself, far from exhausted, carries on at the Majestic with Jay C. Flippen and Happy Felton in the old Olsen and Johnson roles. It will be no great surprise to anybody if both of them run longer than "Tobacco Road."

As one of the few remaining citizens of this city who has never got around to attending "Hellzapoppin," this reviewer looked upon "Sons O' Fun" last night as a new experience, and will therefore report on it as if its popular predecessor had never happened.

"Sons O' Fun" is an elaborate, thickly populated musical show with a carnival atmosphere and sultry South American rhythms supplied by that fetching Good Will Ambassador from Brazil, Carmen Miranda.

The Messrs. Olsen and Johnson, who began their joint career entertaining the boys at Middle Western business men's luncheons, are apparently convinced that audiences want something doing every minute both on and off the stage, and that most people who attend musical shows are just great big kids at heart. As a result, the show actually begins at 8 o'clock although the curtain does not rise until half an hour later. Carnival turns are performed all over the auditorium while the audience is trying to find its seats, and stooges in dress suits see to it that there is as much confusion as possible.

Plenty of Shootin'

When the show proper finally gets under way, the orchestra comes in wearing long

hair, and a terrific din ensues via loud speaker, complicated by shrieks from a fire siren, the clash of cymbals, the ringing of gongs, the honking of horns, the shooting of cannon, revolvers and even fire-crackers, and the belaboring of stooges trying to make themselves heard above the tumult.

The noise has hardly died down, when all the lights go out and weird, ghostly figures float about overhead, phosphorescent wraiths career up and down the aisles, to the accompaniment of shrill feminine shrieks, and the entire audience is showered with soap bubbles. Even the intermission is geared for sound. A tribe of pow-wow Indians and a delegation of G-Men patrol the aisles, seeing to it that the pandemonium never lets up, even for a moment.

Through it all, the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson, escorted by a whole fleet of stooges, display choice wares from their bag of tricks. There is nothing subtle about Olsen and Johnson humor, and we must admit a little of it

goes a long way in this department, but "Sons O' Fun," nevertheless, is seldom dull. There is always the off-chance that you may be hit on the head by a flying hat, a dead bird or an egg. A stork flies by at one point, dropping a babe into the lap of a lady stooge just ahead. Several persons alongside suddenly get up and take off their clothes. A fellow mounts a telegraph pole near the proscenium and sits there all evening, listening to the radio. And Al Smith dances in the aisle with a chorus girl, goes up on the stage with the rest of the gentlemen recruited for the number, and loses his dress coat in the melee.

Carmen Miranda Sings

With so many distracting sights and sounds, it was sometimes difficult to concentrate on the less fantastic affairs transpiring on the stage, but Miss Miranda did hold our attention while she was in the spotlight, singing a little bit of English now as well as her native tongue and wearing cloth of gold, pounds of beads and bracelets, and a basket of fruit on her head.

Raoul Pene DuBois, the designer, has provided, as usual, some lovely color effects, and Robert Alton has staged the aboriginal dances, but "Sons O' Fun" is merely routine in its song numbers. It is more in its element when the carnival acts are going on. We particularly enjoyed the Fitchmen, who imitate all sorts of musical instruments with their Sing-a-Tinas; Walton and O'Rourke, whose puppet show is clever and entertaining; and Ben Beri, an agile and amusing juggler. Frank Libuse, who does a crazy piano and flute act with frantic coloratura aid from Margot Brander, will be recalled as a feature of the "Aquacade" at the World's Fair.

"Sons O' Fun" is a big, noisy, rip-roaring show full of opulent trappings but built on the tried-and-true Olsen and Johnson formula. In it "audience participation" is a major part of the performance and theatre-goers who do not get a kick out of "participating" would do well to stay away. The Winter Garden is likewise no place for those who prefer satire and subtly to rowdy humor and carnival atmosphere. Olsen and Johnson fans, however, should have a whale of an evening for their money.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, December 2, 1941

'Sons O' Fun' Opens at the Winter Garden

Olsen and Johnson, Carmen Miranda and Others in Hilarious Musical

By JOHN ANDERSON

HELLZA has popped again and the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson exploded last night with a new Winter Garden show which managed to combine the best features of an exclusive madhouse, a de luxe musical, a shooting gallery, a volcano, and Miss Carmen Miranda, all fine attractions and all magnificently scrambled. It is called "Sons o' Fun," and its katzenjammer antics make "Hellzapoppin" seem rather sedate, or what we used to call a quiet evening in the theatre.

After this hilarious asylum I imagine people will drift back to "Hellzapoppin" to rest up and enjoy a nice, comfortable straitjacket.

For the Masters of Pandemonium (Pander Olsen and Montum Johnson) have stepped up the formula of their original lunacy and shot the works. They shot a cow flying over the stage of the Winter Garden to improve on an old joke. They shot the picture of a battleship and the darned thing not only fired back but promptly sank. They had the First Night customers, including ex-Gov. Smith, dancing in the aisles and putting their coats on the chorus girls.

The intermission was attacked by whooping Indians, some rather tangible ghosts swooped over the audience, and surprised the lovely lady with George Jean Nathan, and if it means anything to the boys I don't mind admitting that I, personally, am a wreck. But as soon as I can pull myself together I think I'll go back for another shot.

Though the general idiosyncrasy of the show suggests that it is simply an enlargement on "Hellzapoppin," it is actually a good deal more than that. Not only have Olsen and

Johnson called in such first-class showmen as Robert Alton, Edward Duryea Dowling and Raoul Pene du Bois for dances, production and costumes, not only have they added the luminous and fascinating Miranda to their cast for her personal witchworks, and put Ella Logan in there to sing, but they have added such genuinely funny men as Frank Libuse and Joe Besser to the gag department, found some excellent dancers and a number of amusing specialties. Thus while the Olsen and Johnson touch is almost never absent from the delirium, the head nuts do not seem to be overworking or straining.

All-Out Insanity

Such comparative ease and scholarly leisure doubtless provoked them to cook up some wonderful and incredible events. There is a brilliantly deranged sketch on joining the Army, and another in which Mr. Johnson

seems to have some difficulty getting to bed on a quiet evening in the country.

There are burlesques in the old Winter Garden manner on "Charley's Aunt" and "Pamela Hattie," and an all-out insanity called "Hellzapoppin' Night in Buckeye, Arizona," a sketch which deserves immortality as the one in which Olsen and Johnson sink the picture of a battleship hanging right over the bar.

It is doubtless too late in everybody's history to worry about the smuttier aspects of the Olsen-Johnson humor, but a little cleaning up here and there might add variety if not surprise to the other pleasures of the evening. Mr. Besser is immensely funny, especially in the Army recruiting scene, and Mr. Libuse fits exactly into the zany pattern with his familiar but still entertaining piano routine with the indestructible Margot Brander.

Miss Miranda, of the celebrated Sous American Way, is as gleaming and mischievous as ever, as provocative and bold. Her material isn't quite up to the perfection of her debut two years ago, but her singing is captivating, her presence fascinating. She would do better, perhaps, not to dance as much as she does, and her exotic brilliance scarcely fits into the informal colloquy with Olsen and Johnson before the curtain. But she's a wonder.

Among Specialties

Among the specialties there is a dashing dance team, Rosario and Antonio, a couple of pitchforked satanisms, and a number of remarkable music on the Sing-a-Tina, some admirable juggling by Ben Beri, a good but over-long puppet number, and a wild cock-fight featuring Basiloff and Ivan Kirov. The songs by Jack Yellen and Sam E. Fain are enough to strangle the show together, and they provide some excellent musical back-grounds for Mr. Alton's dance designs. Mr. Du Bois's scenery and costumes have the distinction of smartness and good color, and in Harry Kaufman's production the whole thing moves swiftly and smoothly.

Maybe my preliminary bout with "Hellzapoppin" has worn me down but I laughed and laughed. "Sons o' Fun" is twin bedlam at its wildest and as crazy as they come, but a whole lot handsomer.

"Sons o' Fun"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 2, 1941

Olsen and Johnson With Carmen Miranda and a Basket of Gags Called 'Sons O' Fun'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AFTER a brief pause for motion-picture high-jinks, Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson have returned to the scene of former triumph. *"Sons o' Fun"* is the title of their new corn-shucking bee, which was played in most parts of the Winter Garden last evening. With *"Hellzapoppin"* stored in another theatre, they have now acquired the sulphurous Carmen Miranda, who wears jingling costumes and wiggles her music, and Ella Logan, who can sing a song with Tin Pan Alley gusto, and they have bought and paid for an excellent production. *"Hellzapoppin"* has come into a fortune and is putting on the dog.

But the Olsen and Johnson culture remains much the same. When you come through the wicket a stage cop who is smoking a cigar warns you against smoking, and Frank Libuse is roaming mischievously through the aisles, ushering people to the wrong seats, carrying a potted palm through rows of seated patrons and, after whistling for a ladder, ushering one couple up to a box. Mrs. Johnson still wanders through the house, shouting for Oscar and chaperoning a baby that ages into young womanhood before the evening is

over. Proceed with caution in the dancing in the aisles. For the girls slip on the jackets of the volunteer gentlemen and drag them up on the stage in their shirt sleeves. Al Smith joined good-naturedly in the brawl last evening and got a good hand for his affable sportsmanship, and Jimmy Savo, darting gnome-like down the aisle, got away with another man's dress coat.

In these new scenes of unaccustomed splen-

dor the fun is a little less furious than it was last time. There is nothing to compare with the introductory screen buffoonery or the startling imbecility of the cake-of-ice nonsense, and nothing to compare with the elaborate low comedy of the upr-house number. In the second edition of *"Hellzapoppin"* the inflammatory Miranda is over-produced and gives off heat that is fairly temperate in comparison with the sizzle of *"Streets of Paris."* Mr. Olsen's and Mr. Johnson's uproar house still gives off some loudly explosive gags. With the assistance of Joe Besser, who is an enormously funny comic, they have staged a hilarious army training camp number. Johnson's sketch about a quiet night in the country is in the slap-stick vein of hurry and insanity that suits him best. And the Pitchmen are mighty grotesque as music-makers; Libuse has some ludicrous stuff to pound out of a piano; Ben Beri is a droll juggler, and Walton and O'Rourke have some delightful puppet-fooling to contribute.

Thanks to Raoul Pène du Bois, *"Sons o' Fun"* is full of gorgeous costumes and sunny splendors. Although Jack Yellen and Sam E. Falin have not outdazzled the orchestra with new music, Miss Logan sings what is set before her with great crackle. Rosario and Antonio are good-neighborly enough to stamp out some furious dances in the South American way. Olsen and Johnson hospitably labor to keep the gaze running amid the luster of a handsome production. The belly-laughs as-say up to the content of legal tender. Those fire-crackers in Johnson's tall hat are O.K. in the military sketch.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 2, 1941

They're In Again

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

THERE are those who fear that the American people have gone soft and are no longer hardy enough to stand up before the alarms and excursions of modern warfare. After attendance at the local premiere of *"Son o' Fun,"* the Olsen and Johnson successor to *"Hellzapoppin,"* I am in a position to dispute any such melancholy contention. If the men and women of the United States cannot only endure the barrage of sound and fury, the bombardment of noise and missile and personal assault, of this new bedlam carnival, but even give every sign of loving it, then I have no doubt that ours is still a strong and fearless populace, to whom an air raid would be a quiet evening. I know that I found the attacks from the sky in Chungking and Madrid far less harrowing to the nerves.

At least *"Sons o' Fun"* proves, as *"Hellzapoppin"* demonstrated before it, that audiences do not go to the theater to relax. The advertisements for the new show warned the first-nighters to "come prepared to defend yourself," and the warning is by no means to be taken lightly. Long before the revue officially gets under way the antics begin, with the early arrivals as the chief victims. From the start, the spectators are subjected to a bombardment of gags, weapons of various

sorts, endless noise, blank cartridges, wind implements, amiable personal affronts of one kind or another, and some of the most ancient quips known to vaudeville. Again press gangs composed of insistent chorus girls lure ready victims to the aisles and then to the stage for dancing. It is all in the spirit of fun, but it calls for a lot of audience hardiness.

As for the quality of the show, all that I can say is that *"Sons o' Fun"* is just *"Hellzapoppin"* dressed up a bit and put on with a slightly more lavish touch. The millions who admired, and are continuing to admire, the

earlier Olsen and Johnson revel should certainly find at least an equal amount of amusement in the new work. It is noisier, brasher and at least a trifle better looking, although in no way could you call *"Sons o' Fun"* a handsome show. Olsen and Johnson are just as active as ever and not any less funny, which to my mind would have been quite a feat of a repulsive kind. The music is just as insignificant, and the numbers, save for a lot of the earlier offstage gags, are in the tradition of the minor revue. Even though I am no enthusiast for audience participation, I must say that the show is funnier before it gets up on the stage.

In at least one respect, the current edition of the Bedlam Follies is superior to its predecessor. It has Carmen Miranda. In her eccentric and highly personalized fashion, Miss Miranda is by way of being an artist, and her numbers give the show its one touch of distinction. As for the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson, there can be no doubt that they have a fine sense of madness about them, and the quality of ingenuity in the gags and the nonsense that they think up. Obviously they are smart showmen, but I have still to find any one, even among their most strenuous admirers, who thinks that they are comedians of any particular skill. This, it is hardly necessary to add, is the report of one who saw *"Hellzapoppin"* twice, found a minimum of fun in it both times, and, therefore, stands somewhere outside of the human race. *"Sons o' Fun"* is sure to be a hit, and it will be over this reviewer's virtually prostrate body.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 2, 1941

We Predict Great Grandsons o' Fun

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AT moments *Sons o' Fun* makes *Hellzapoppin* seem positively stodgy. There were times last night when it would have been sheer understatement to compare what was going on to life in any half-way self-respecting lunatic asylum. Take, for instance, that brief spell when, in pitch darkness, great batlike things whirled and dipped all over the Win-

ter Garden. Or that whole half hour before the regular show began, when Frank Libuse cavorted as "head usher," when folks were climbing ladders to get into the upstairs boxes, and when a horde of honest-to-God customers were forced to go through a kind of Coney Island Dippy House in order to get to their seats. There was also a dance number which went the *Hellzapoppin* Booms-a-Daisy one better, with showgirls fishing partners (including Al Smith) out of the audience, annexing their coats, and creating a mix-up of garments that it took quite a while to unscramble. And at a very advanced hour, when I had to reach for my hat and run, there was a big "auction sale" going on which probably sent everybody home with quantities of loot.

Taken as a whole, however, *Sons o' Fun* has a good deal more method in its madness than *Hellzapoppin* did. There's still an abundance of hoke and ham and corn, many a rich whiff of old vaudeville, and as much of Olsen and Johnson as any one could fairly ask for. But this time things aren't so wacky hit-or-miss, so swarming with pure nonsensical claptrap; a good chunk of *Sons o' Fun* is carefully cut along the lines of standard revue. This time the proprietors have clearly intended their musical numbers to serve as more than filler. For one thing, there is Carmen Miranda all

done up in those steamer-basket headresses of hers, and those costumes I must beg off trying to describe; but shaking her hips and chattering her Portuguese songs much as of yore. There are some skillful Robert Alton dance routines which I'd have liked better if they'd been less hoisterous. There are some songs entrusted to Ella Logan, who got a big hand for *Happy in Love*, though I fear she's not my dish. Walton and O'Rourke do a good job with puppets, Ben Beri juggles, and The Pitchmen do amusing musical imitations with a small object they have christened the sing-a-tina.

Except for La Miranda, none of this is big-time revue material, however. But it's professional, and it balances the goofiness of the rest of the proceedings. Colly considered, *Sons o' Fun* is a better show than *Hellzapoppin*, and so should run for 80 or 90 years. But, of course, when it comes to the *Hellzapoppin* family, nobody does any cold consideration except a few reviewers. After all, these things aren't shows; they're national institutions. Well—at least when it was good and crazy—I liked *Sons o' Fun* fairly well myself. But I'm aware several million people will like it a thousand times better. I have softened a bit, shall we say, but am still to be really converted.